VARIOUS USES OF LANGUAGE—J. L. AUSTIN

Dr. Sumita Dutta

Introduction:

Being an ordinary language philosopher, Austin relies on ordinary language for starting any philosophical discussion. According to other ordinary language philosophers like Wittgenstein and Ryle an understanding of ordinary language was important because they believed that the traditional problems of philosophy arose from misunderstanding and misinterpretations of ordinary language and they wished to study ordinary language only in so far as this was essential for eliminating these philosophical problems. But unlike Wittgenstein and Ryle, Austin is interested in fine distinctions in language for their own sake and to him, the fact that it solves many problems of philosophy, is only a by – product of it. Though he belongs to the same trend as that of Later Wittgenstein and Ryle but he differs from them in introducing the fact that by language we not only say something but do something. In Austin's philosophy ,language achieves an extra linguistic import .He looks at language entirely from a new perspective and his originality and novelty lies herein. He emphasizes on the pragmatic aspect of language, that is on the functions or uses of language. Later Wittgenstein and Ryle also speaks about the uses of language. Later Wittgenstein holds the view that language has many functions to perform and statement of facts is only one of them. Meaning of a statement is not to be found in the relationship of elements but in the use which is made of them. Ryle also holds that in order to overcome the philosophical confusion we must be careful about the workings of the words or phrases in ordinary language.And we must note whether those words conform with the actual situation or not.Austin also share the same view.But what is novel in Austin , is his recognition of the fact that in using language , man not only says something but does something , that is carries out a variety of performances which are not linguistic. This is the main contention of his performative thesis.

Traditional philosophers like the logical positivists assume that the language has only one function - that is to represent facts. That is, statements are supposed to describe facts which should be either true or false. Expressions like questions, commands, exclamations, wishes etc. are thrown out from the purview of statement. For they neither describe facts nor

can be said to be either true or false. According to them, such statements are pseudo statements. Against this position Austin observes: ―We very often also use utterances which are neither true nor false and at the same time not nonsensical. Such utterances, Austin calls 'performatives'. They not only say something but do something.That is they do not describe or report any fact and are thus not true or false.[1]For example , 'I do' (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) – as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony , or 'I name this ship Queen Elizabeth' ,or 'I bet you six- pence, it will rain tomorrow' are familiar instances of performatives. These sort of utterances are neither true nor false, but still meaningful. Thus, the distinction between constatives and performative is quite obvious.[2]

2. Different criteria to distinguish performatives from constatives:

In order to isolate performatives from the constatives Austin formulates different criteria which are as follows: grammatical criterion, vocabulary criterion, infelicity criterion, and logical criterion. Let us discuss them one by one:

i) **Grammatical Criterion**: Austin points out that performatives are often expressed in first person, singular number, present tense active voice like, 'I promise', I warn you', I name you, ' 'I bet' etc. But later he realizes that performatives do not always have this grammatical form. For, 'We promise' or 'We consent '(which are in first person plural form) or 'You are hereby warned '(which is in the second or third person and in the passive voice) is as much a performative as 'I warn you'. Further it is to be noted that , 'I state that….' or 'I bet that ….' also has the same grammatical form , but that is a constative utterance. So, the grammatical criterion fails to distinguish performative from constative. Let us see whether vocabulary criterion is sufficient to distinguish performative from constative.

ii) **Vocabulary Criterion**: Having failed to distinguish performatives from constatives by the grammatical criteria Austin turns his attention to vocabulary criterion to see whether it can provide some words which may justify performative utterance. There are some words for e.g., 'thank', 'promise ',etc. which look like performative .But this criterion also fails because there are performatives in which no such special words are used and also non-performatives using those words. For example, 'I shall' is a performative, though it contains no special words. Again in a match a spectator can utter 'off-side', but the utterance is not performative since only the umpire has the right or authority to declare 'off-side'. There are many verbs which

look like performative for e.g., 'I assume that' but the utterance can be made without actually realizing what I was assuming. Again 'I assert' or 'I deny' are supposed to be performatives. But we can assert or deny without saying anything by gestures like nodding or shaking of head or saying something by implication. They seem to be performatves but do not possess the characteristics of performatves .Hence it is clear that the vocabulary criterion also fails to isolate performatives from constatives.

iii) Felicity – infelicity or happiness – unhappiness condition: Having failed to distinguish performatives from the constatives by the grammatical and the vocabulary criterion, Austin turns his attention to a new criterion felicity – infelicity or happiness – unhappiness condition. A performative utterance is said to satisfy the felicity or happiness condition if, in the first place, it follows a certain accepted conventional procedure; in the second place, if the speaker is the right person to carry out the procedure ; in the third place, if the procedure is carried out correctly and completely and in the fourth place, if it is the right situation or time to do it and the person who issues the utterance must have the requisite thoughts or feelings or intentions as designed in the procedure and lastly, he must conduct himself accordingly. For example, the expression, 'I name this ship Queen Elizabeth' cannot be false but can be unhappy if I am not the right person to name ships, if this is not the right situation or time to do it, and if I donot follow accepted conventional procedure of using performative utterances. If these rules are not followed the act purported by the utterance is not achieved. This type of infelicity is known as misfire. To this class belong other infelicities like misinvocation, misapplication, misexecution, flaws and hitches. If a man says to his wife 'I divorce you', the act of divorce cannot be made in a society where there is no accepted conventional procedure. This type of infelicity may be called misinvocation. Secondly, if someone says, I appoint you ', where he is not entitled to appoint, then this type of infelicity is called misapplication. Thirdly, when the procedure is not executed correctly and completely then the performative utterance is subject to the infelicity of misexecution, which may be again either flaws or hitches. Generally, the use of inexplicit or uncertain reference gives rise to flaws. For example if someone says, 'My house………' when he has two. The utterance 'I bet you …..' is subject to the infelicity of hitches if nobody says done'. Again, if the person who utters the utterance does not have the requisite thoughts or feelings or intention and could not conduct himself accordingly then the utterance is subject to the infelicity of abuse or insincerity. If somebody says 'I promise….' but does not intend to keep it , then it is insincere. Again , when one says, 'I congratualate you

for your success' without being pleased or believing in his credit (i.e without adequate feeling). So , the congratulations are hollow. Similar is the case with 'I advise you' when I donot think that it will suit you. Misunderstanding is another type of infelicity to which all utterances are subject to. It may happen that the hearer may not understand the intention of the speaker or the speaker may utter something in such circumstances like duress or accident for which he is not responsible. In all such cases the infelicity is misunderstanding.

Austin shows that the felicity or infelicity criterion also fails to isolate performatives from constatives for he observes that constatives are subject to all types of infelicity as stated above and performatives can be assessed in terms of truth /falsity dimension. Let us consider the first option as to how constatives are subject to felicity/infelicity condition ? It is to be noted that a performative in order to be happy must follow an accepted conventional procedure. Similar is the case with constatives. For instance, the statement 'X divorces his wife' cannot be made in a society where the convention of divorce is not accepted. Again, we have seen that in issuing a performative one must be sure that the person and the circumstances are appropriate. But suppose a person is ordered to do something and he replies 'You cannot order me' or 'You have not the right to order me' which means that you are not the appropriate authority. Now it may be the case that the person is appropriate but the situation is such that the person is not in a position to make the statement. For example, a statement about other person's feelings or about the future or of some imperceptible object. Thus, we find that constatives are not to be judged only by truth/falsity condition but like the performatives, they are subject to felicity/ infelicity condition. Again, performatives, at times may be assessed by truth/falsity condition instead by felicity/infelicity condition. For example, if somebody says, 'I warn you that the bull is about to charge'– it is a performative performing the act of warning. Now if the bull is not there then we cannot explain the situation as infelicitious. For, the utterance is neither void nor insincere, as it has been uttered seriously to warn somebody.In such cases the performative may be judged as 'mistaken' or 'false'. So, we find that truth and falsity which are the distinctive characteristic of constative statement can be ascribed to a performative statement also. Thus, felicity/infelicity condition also fails to isolate performatives from constatives.

iv) Logical Criterion: Austin at last turns his attention to the logical behaviour of constatives and performatives and tried to examine whether performatives can be distinguished

from the constatives on these grounds. When one statement entails another statement, we can say that the conjunction of the first and the negation of the second proposition leads to inconsistency. The performatives also bear the same relation. For example, 'I promise' entails 'I ought' . We cannot say 'I promise but I ought not' just as in entailment if p entails q , (p.~q) is inconsistent. Again as in entailment the rule of transposition holds, that is , if p entails q , then ~q entails ~p ; so in the case of performative , 'I promise' entails I ought and 'I ought not' entails 'I do not promise'. Again, in case of the relation of implication Austin holds that assertion implies a belief. When one says something, he honestly believes what he says. Similarly, when one utters the performative 'I promise' seriously, he intends to keep it. As in the case of statement, stating and not believing lead to inconsistency, so also in case of performative promising and not intending to keep it leads to inconsistency. Again, in case of presupposition both p and ~p presuppose q, so also in performative: 'I bequeath my watch to you'and 'I do not bequeath my watch to you' equally presuppose that I have a watch. If p presupposes q, the truth of q is a necessary condition of the truth-value of p. But if q is false, p is neither true nor false. Austin thinks that in such cases p is neither true nor false, but void'. According to Austin performatives also sometimes become void. Thus, so far as the logical behaviour is concerned the performatives and the constatives seem to share the same platform. That is, they are analogous to one another in respect of their logical behaviour. So, the logical criterion also fails to isolate performatives from the constatives. Hence, the failure to find a suitable criterion to distinguish performatives from the constatives leads Austin to abandon the constative-performative dichotomy and to look for a different mode of distinguishing utterances, in terms of speech act which initiates a new direction in the philosophy of language. So, in the next section we will deal with Austin's theory of Speech Acts.

3. **Austin's theory of Speech Acts**

The speech act, according to Austin, can be investigated under three different heads: (1) as meaningful speech, (2) as speech with a certain conventional force and (3) as speech with a certain nonconventional effect and accordingly he names the acts as follows: i) locutionary, ii) illocutionary and iii) perlocutionary. When we utter a sentence then through such utterance a sound is created. In creating such sound, we naturally donot make any meaningless sentence, rather we create this sound by making a grammatical combination of words which we collect from our linguistic vocabulary. In addition to that the utterance must have a definite sense and

reference. Such acts are locutionary act. Further Austin distinguishes three sub-acts which come under the heading of locutionary acts. These are called the phonetic act, the phatic act and rhetic act. The phonetic act is merely the act of uttering certain noises. For Austin claims that in order for there to be a speech act certain noises must be produced by the human voice. But this is not correct, since one can say something by means of writing, the production of graphemes. There are also many other vehicles of speech, other sign- systems such as semaphore, morse code, smoke signals, etc. The phatic act is the act of uttering of certain vocables or words, i.e., noises of certain types belonging to a certain vocabulary, conforming to a certain grammar.[3] It is at this phatic level that actual languages are first considered. It is the context, including the speaker's intentions (i.e. total' context) , that determines which phatic act the phonetic act gives rise to. The rhetic act is the performance of an act of using those vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference.[4] For example, 'He said—The cat is on the mat', reports a phatic act (reported in direct speech), whereas 'He said that, the cat is on the mat' reports a rhetic act (reported in indirect speech). From this it is clear that whenever we perform a locutionary act i.e., in the sense of saying something in the full normal sense of saying, it includes three acts: phonetic, phatic and rhetic. Phonetic acts are not concerned with meaning. When we perform a phatic acts we follow the rules of some particular grammar and vocabulary. For example, when we say, 'The boy loves the girl', we follow the rules of English grammar and the utterance becomes meaningful. But the meaning remains incomplete as the speaker is not clear about which boy or girl he is referring to. But when he makes clear that the boy refers to John and the girl refers to Gita then we perform the rhetic act. Thus, sense and reference make the utterance meaningful in a complete sense. The meaning which remains incomplete in the phatic stage becomes clear in the rhetic stage.

In the second place, the creation of words which we make through our utterances express the intention of the speaker. This act of expressing the speaker 's intention is described by Austin as an illocutionary act. It has a certain force in saying something. For example, 'Shut the door' has the force of command. These acts or order etc. are illocutionary acts. Illocutionary act has been defined by Austin as an act performed in saying something as distinguished from locutionary act of saying something. Locutionary act is concerned with the literal meaning of an utterance. But literal meaning is not enough to explain the full significance of the utterance. To know the full significance of an utterance something more is needed. Hence, Austin introduces the concept of force over and above meaning.

Austin puts forward five basic categories or types of illocutionary acts which are as follows: Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissives, Expositives, Behabitives. Let us discuss these one by one. Verdictives: He characterizes it as consisting of giving a verdict by the judge or administrator —in the delivering of a finding, official or unofficial, upon evidence or reasons as to value or fact so far as these are distinguishable.[5]It is a judicial act as distinct from legislative or executive acts, which are both exercitives. The verbs he associates with this group include find (as in —We find the man guilty),rule(as in —I rule that you were out), acquit, hold, describe, analyse, hold, convict, diagnose, assess, etc. Exercitives: It is the giving of a decision in favor of or against a certain course of action or advocacy of it. It is a decision that something is to be so, as distinct from a judgement that it is so.[6] Examples of this kind are: order , command , direct, sentence (as in —I sentence you to five years in jail) , choose , claim , recommend,etc.These are legislative and executive in nature as against verdictives which are judicial. Commissives: —The whole point of a commissive is to commit the speaker to a certain course of action.[7] For example, promise, give my word, convenant, undertake, mean to, intend,bet , swear, favour, pledge, vow, etc. Behabitives : This class includes the notion of reaction to other people's behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct.[8] For example , congratualate, as in —'I congratualate you for your victory'. Here I am reacting to someone else's behaviour and fortune. Other examples are: thank, apologize, commiserate, felicitate, welcome, bless, curse, criticize, etc. Expositives : These he says are —used in acts of exposition involving the expounding of views , the conducting of argument, and the clarifying of usages and references.[9]For example , affirm , deny , state ,describe, inform , accept, illustrate, answer, etc. Thus, Austin's contribution to the development of linguistic analysis consists in showing that the occurrence of an utterance matters seriously and that the words are to be explained by the context in which it is used.

Again, our utterances are not intended simply to express our intention ; through our utterances when we advise or command or request or make people alert , then we are said to perform a perlocutionary act . For example, when we say, 'A dog is coming', then we make people alert about a possible danger. This kind of speech act is characterized by Austin as perlocutionary act. This kind of act produces certain consequential effects on the hearer. Saying something will often produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts actions of persons and that effect is non- conventionally brought about. A man who says to his wife,

for example, 'I promise you a diamond ring' may please her. There is no convention though whereby saying ' I promise you a diamond ring', pleases the hearer . The effect was purely natural. when one utters 'I promise' hereby promises. The utterance in question conventionally brings about that a diamond ring was promised but non-conventionally brings about the fact that a woman was pleased. The conventional effect is the illocutionary effect and the nonconventional effect is the perlocutionary effect. The act was an illocutionary act of promising and a perlocutionary act of pleasing. Although Austin introduces a distinction between three kinds of acts, yet they can be performed simultaneously on one occasion. For instance, by issuing an utterance like: 'The bull is dangerous', the speaker says something in the full normal sense of saying it , performing thereby a locutionary act . At the same time, he tries to warn the hearer of the possible danger and thus performing the illocutionary act of warning and finally the speaker intends to produce certain consequences like alarming or alerting and thus performs the perlocutionary act.

After all it can be said that Austin does not provide any metaphysics of speech act. He is also not concerned with providing any general theory of speech-act. He is concerned with how language works in a particular situation. More precisely, he is concerned with the active application of language in a particular situation. Every speech –act involves both the speaker and the hearer. For the speaker intends to produce some effects or consequences on the hearer through saying something. And the hearer participates in the speech-situation by getting himself understand the intention of the speaker. Apart from the participation of the speaker and the hearer another thing which Austin emphasizes is the context or the situation in which the utterance is used. It is investigating the way language is ordinarily used. It tends to describe linguistic practices in everyday situation. This seems to be the genesis of his doctrine of speech-act.

A Critical Examination of Austin"s Position:

Austin's position has been challenged from various directions. We will consider Searle's and Cohen's criticism of Austin's theory of Speech Act .

i)   Searle's criticism of Austin's theory of Speech Act

Austin makes a distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. Searle argues that there is no need to formulate locutionary act as opposed to illocutionary act. He contends

that no utterance is completely 'force – neutral'. Every utterance has potentially illocutionary force within it. Hence every utterance is illocutionary .[10] Further, Austin analyses locutionary act into three parts: phonetic act, phatic act and rhetic act. Searle contends that rhetic act as formulated by Austin can be eliminated. Thus instead of classifying the Speech –act into a) Locutionary: Phonetic, Phatic, Rhetic b) Illocutionary…Searle classified Speech –Act into: Phonetic, Phatic, Illocutionary. He argues that rhetic part of locutionary act is also unnecessary. For rhetic acts are reported in indirect speech, for example, 'He said that the cat was on the mat' and while doing so the verbs used are nothing but very general illocutionary verbs. For instance, the verb used in the indirect form of speech of rhetic act may mean to order, to request, to command, to urge, to advice, and so on. Thus, Austin's characterization of rhetic act is really one of illocutionary acts and there is no rhetic act as opposed to illocutionary acts. Searle says, ― every rhetic act is an illocutionary act.[11]

lt is in this way Searle criticises Austin classification of speech-act. In fact, the rhetic acts as mentioned by Austin are pure abstractions and can have no independent existence of their own. Phones can have independent existence, for, we can utter noises without making a phatic act. Again, the speaker can perform a phatic act even if there is something wrong in rhetic act and thus can have independent existence. A rhetic act includes a phatic act but not vice versa and thus a rhetic act is a pure abstraction. But the success at the rhetic stage determines the success of the locutionary act as a whole, for without rhetic act the meaning of utterance cannot be complete.

Further, Austin's classification of illocutionary acts into five basic categories is not free from defects. There is no consistent principle or set of criteria on the basis of which the classification has been made. There were many overlapping and borderline cases. For example, 'analyze' in the expositive camp can be shown to be a case of verdictive. 'Describe' is classed both as an expositive and as verdictive. Most of the verbs in the list of expositives can be shown to fit the definition of verdictives. For example, affirm, deny, state, class, identify, conclude, etc. Again, 'swear' is both an expositive and a commissive. Some former constatives are classed as verdictives, while others are classed as expositive. It is not clear why some belong to one group rather than another. Related to these objections is the further difficulty that not all the verbs listed under a class really satisfy the given definitions. For example, nominate, appoint, and excommunicate are not giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course

of action rather they advocate it. Moreover, it is not clear why just those five groups emerged in order to bring order ,to our language.[12] Realizing the difficulties in Austin's classification of illocutionary acts , John Searle tried to rectify them and classed them mainly in terms of their purpose in an article entitled —*A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts*[13] and provide an alternative taxonomy of illocutionary acts which is as follows: i) Assertives :The purpose of these kind of act is to commit the speaker to the truth of what they say. Scientific claims, ordinary observations and even reports about definition belong to this group. ii) Commissives: It is like Austin, with no change whatsoever. The purpose of these speech act is to commit the speaker one way or another. For example, I promise to pay you the money, or I vow to get revenge‖, etc. iii) Directives: The purpose of this speech acts is to get the hearer to do something. For example, I order you to leave, I command you to stand at attention, etc. iv) Expressives : The purpose of this speech act is to express the psychological state of the speaker with respect of what they are talking about. For example, apologize, congratulate, greet someone in the morning, etc. v) Declarations: The purpose of this speech act is to bring about a state of affairs simply by issuing a speech act. When the meeting organizer declares the meeting open, it is open. Saying it makes it so. Thus, Searle completes the work which Austin started.

ii) **Cohen's Objection to Austin's theory of illocutionary force**

Austin has mentioned that explicit permormative formula makes the force of the utterance explicit. But this claim seems to go against him. Some philosophers like Cohen and others, seem to reject the idea of force '. For according to them if illocutionary force of a utterance can be expressed in explicit performative formula, there is no need to establish force apart from meaning. If an utterance is expressed in explicit performative formula for e.g., 'I warn you that the bull is dangerous', then it explains both meaning and force of an utterance. In such cases meaning exhausts the force of an utterance or force is built into it's meaning . Cohen argues along this line and rejects what Austin calls 'illocutionary force'. He says, 'In short, what Austin calls the illocutionary force of an utterance is that aspect of it's meaning which is either conveyed by its explicitly performative prefix, if it has one, or might have been so conveyed by the use of such an expression. Any attempt to pries off this aspect of meaning, and regard it not as meaning but as something else, leads to paradox and confusion''. [14]

Searle, however does not accept Cohen's rejection of illocutionary force, which seems to him unfortunate.[15]According to Searle , in cases where meaning determines the force

, as in the case of explicit performatives, there are not two different kinds of acts but two labels of the same act. It is true that if explicit performative formula is supposed to make explicit the force of an utterance, force cannot keep it's separate identity as distinct from meaning and force is thus absorbed into the meaning. To defend Austin's thesis of force we have to avoid the explicit performative formula and have to find out a solution from a different direction. Meaning can be considered in different stages or levels of the use of language. When Austin describes illocutionary act then he considers meaning from a new dimension. When an utterance is made then it is necessary to notice in what sense the speakers are using the utterance in a particular circumstance. For e.g. 'John will come tomorrow' informs the hearer of John's arrival. This is what Austin calls the force of the utterance. So, Austin suggested that, for determining the complete significance or implication of an utterance different levels of meaning should be taken into account. In support we may refer to Strawson[16]who also speaks of different levels of meaning like literal meaning, literal-cum-referential meaning and another dimension of meaning, that is what Austin calls illocutionary force.

Austin distinguishes between force and meaning because he adopts a narrow theory of meaning. The narrow theory holds that the core meaning of an utterance remains constant in different contexts and uses. Herein lies the difference between a narrow theory of meaning and a wide theory of meaning as advocated by Cohen.[17] According to Cohen a verbal form has a multiplicity of meanings, for it can be used to make different statement dependent on the circumstances and context. In this way the meaning of a statement varies from one use to another. Though Austin supports narrow theory of meaning but he admits that in a concrete context the issuing of an utterance together with other factors produces a different dimension of significance. Thus the sentence 'Leave me alone' has only one core meaning but it's significance is different when issued by a superior to his subordinate and by a person to his friend. For in the first case, it will signify an order, and in the second case it is to be taken as request. So, in the narrow theory of meaning the speaker and the hearer play a very important role in determining the force of an utterance. But the question is: ls the narrow theory of meaning as adopted by Austin acceptable? Language connects our thoughts or words or sentence to the world. Graham suggests that what is necessary for such a passage from language to world is the generality or re-applicability of language.[18]As the narrow theory of meaning insists on maintaining the uniformity of core meaning of an utterance and it's applicability in various context , so it helps in explaining the relation of language to the world.

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